AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (currently amended) Network apparatus for communicating a recorded message from a calling party to a called party within an Internet Protocol (IP) network, comprising:

a messaging controller for accepting commands over said IP network from said calling party, said messaging controller ~~and for~~ playing and recording digital media including said recorded message;

an encryption encoder/packager coupled to said message controller for encrypting said recorded message in response to an encryption key and packaging said encrypted recorded message with an identifier to produce a protected message file;

media storage for storing said protected message file;

a notification system for sending a notification message over said IP network for said called party to announce said protected message file;

a message distributor for delivering said protected message file from said media storage to said called party over said IP network when requested by said called party; and

a license server for maintaining a decryption key corresponding to said encryption key and said identifier and for responding to a validated request over said IP network for a license from said called party, wherein said validated request includes said identifier, and wherein said license includes said decryption key for accessing said protected message file.

2. (original) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said messaging controller identifies license parameters for providing selected limitations for accessing said protected message file.

3. (original) The apparatus of claim 2 wherein said license parameters are maintained by said license server for inclusion in said license.

4. (original) The apparatus of claim 2 wherein said license parameters are incorporated into said protected message file.

5. (original) The apparatus of claim 2 wherein said messaging controller is responsive to respective commands from said calling party for specifying said selected limitations.

6. (original) The apparatus of claim 2 wherein said selected limitations include default limitations associated with at least one of said called party and said calling party.

7. (original) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said identifier comprises a key identifier for uniquely identifying said decryption key.

8. (currently amended) The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising:

a user agent for establishing a communication session within said IP network between said calling party and said messaging controller; and

a transfer client for exchanging communication signals to and from said calling party.

9. (original) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said notification message is sent to an instant message client.

10. (original) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said notification message is sent to a short message service (SMS) device.

11. (original) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said notification message is sent to an e-mail client.

12. (original) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said message distributor comprises an e-mail server for providing said protected message file as an e-mail attachment.

13. (original) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said message distributor comprises a streaming media server, wherein said notification message provides a stream identification, and wherein said streaming media server streams said protected message file in response to being contacted by a media player.

14. (canceled)

15. (currently amended) A method of sharing a recorded message from a calling party, said recorded message being stored and transmitted within ~~a packet-based~~ an Internet Protocol (IP) network, said method comprising the steps of:

placing a call from said calling party to a called party over said IP network;

determining that said called party is not available for said call;

interconnecting said call with a message service over said IP network;

recording said recorded message as an unprotected digital media file;

encrypting said unprotected digital media file according to an encryption key to generate an encrypted recorded message;

packaging said encrypted recorded message with an identifier to produce a protected message file;

storing said protected message file in media storage;

sending a notification message to said called party over said IP network to announce said protected message file;

delivering said protected message file to said called party over said IP network when requested by said called party; and

responding to a validated request over said IP network for a license from said called party by transmitting said license to said called party over said IP network, said license including a decryption key for accessing said protected message file.

16. (original) The method of claim 15 further comprising the step of identifying license parameters for providing selected limitations for accessing said protected message file.

17. (original) The method of claim 16 wherein said license parameters are maintained by said license server for inclusion in said license.

18. (original) The method of claim 16 wherein said packaging step includes incorporating said license parameters into said protected message file.

19. (original) The method of claim 16 further comprising the step of said calling party generating respective commands for specifying said selected limitations.

20. (original) The method of claim 16 wherein said selected limitations include default limitations associated with at least one of said called party and said calling party.

21. (original) The method of claim 15 wherein said identifier comprises a key identifier for uniquely identifying said encryption key.

22. (currently amended) The method of claim 15 further comprising the steps of:

launching a user agent for establishing a communication session within said IP network between said calling party and said messaging controller; and

launching a transfer client for exchanging communication signals to and from said calling party.

23. (original) The method of claim 15 wherein said step of sending a notification message comprises sending an instant message to an instant message client corresponding to said called party.

24. (original) The method of claim 15 wherein said step of sending a notification message comprises sending an SMS message to an short message service device corresponding to said called party.

25. (original) The method of claim 15 wherein said step of sending a notification message comprises sending an e-mail message to an e-mail server corresponding to said called party.

26. (original) The method of claim 15 wherein said step of delivering said protected message file comprises sending said protected message file from an e-mail server as an e-mail attachment.

27. (original) The method of claim 15 wherein said step of delivering said protected message file comprises streaming said protected message file from a streaming media server, wherein said notification message provides a stream identification, and wherein said streaming media server streams said protected message file in response to receiving a stream request including said stream identification.